

Cutting Brush/Vegetation

Tailgate Safety Talk

Roadside maintenance includes cutting of brush and vegetation as well as the removal of whole trees, bushes, and stumps. There are many hazards associated with these tasks that can be mitigated with smart practices, situational awareness, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

The hazards are everywhere - chain saws, other sharp-edged tools, poisonous plants and insects, thorns, bound and springing clumps of brush, uneven ground, overcrowding of workers, moving equipment, traffic, and utility lines are just some of them.

Situational Awareness. Be mindful that sometimes poisonous snakes lurk and bees, wasps, and hornets build their nests and feed in many places that you do your work – tree limbs and trunks, the ground, idle equipment, stored materials, and even on traffic sign posts. Don't just charge in – make your presence known gradually while you still have a chance to make your escape unharmed. Learn more in our tailgate talks on [bees](#) and [snakes](#).

Poison ivy, oak, and sumac are common along the fringe areas of woods where you may be trimming and removing brush and vegetation. Learn to recognize these (for the first two, they say, “leaves of three, let it be, berries white, get out of sight, and hairy vine, no friend of mine”). They say that 70 to 90 percent of people are allergic to urushiol oil, the irritant that causes the itching and rash when your skin comes into contact with these plants. Long sleeves and pants are recommended, along with gloves and high-top boots. Washing vigorously with warm, soapy water immediately after exposure can often avoid a reaction, but over-the-counter remedies like calamine or Burrow's solution can ease symptoms.

Aside from hostile animals and plants, you need to also remain conscious of passing traffic, moving equipment, and equipment that likes to grab hold of you, like chippers and chainsaws. Uneven slopes and muddy conditions can be a real problem when handling cutting tools and making sure of your escape path from falling or rolling debris is essential.

Safe Work Practices. Think about the conditions and equipment involved:

- Review the safe operating procedures for equipment to be used on the job and perform pre-operational checks. Make sure all equipment is in good working order and safety



lockouts operate correctly.

- Determine the type of traffic control setup and assign personnel specific duties.
- Park in areas that provide safe entrance and exit of the work area. Don't create potential conflicts with other vehicles and equipment operating in the work area. Provide maximum protection for workers getting in and out of vehicles.
- Hearing and eye protection should be used when operating chain saws or chippers. In addition, chaps are essential PPE when operating a chain saw.
- Cut and stack limbs and brush in manageable pieces that are easily handled to avoid back injuries. Use equipment to move logs and large pieces of cut-up materials.
- Use extreme care when cutting trees and brush that are under stress or additional loads, such as conditions following an ice storm. Be mindful of limbs and small trees that may want to spring and injure someone or catch your saw. Larger pieces can roll on the ground, so don't let them get away from you.
- Allow ample space for everyone to work safely. Don't bunch up. Stay clear of chain-saws unless you are the operator or helper.
- Remain aware of each other and in visual contact. Employees on foot must use extreme caution to stay clear of operating equipment. Always establish eye contact with the operator before approaching equipment. Chain saw and chipper operators must be trained to do the job.
- Use caution when handling tools with sharp edges. Gloves are advised when handling and sharpening tools.
- Be aware of loose materials, tripping hazards, uneven ground, slippery surfaces, and areas where equipment is operating.
- Don't cut limbs or trees that may contact overhead utility lines. Stay clear of any and all overhead utilities. Limbs tangled in power lines should be removed only in coordination or by the utility company, who have special PPE and tactics to protect themselves.
- Tree trimming which would require climbing should be performed only by a trained employee or with the use of a bucket truck and appropriate fall protection.
- Wood chippers must be fed with great care to ensure that the worker is not tangled in materials that can draw them into the feed mechanism.



Users of this tailgate talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations.